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# Do We Owe More to Fellow Nationals? The particular and universal ethics of Bosanquet's General Will and Miller's Public Culture<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

There are significant similarities between Bosanquet's ethical function of the state and Miller's defence of nations as communities generating duties. Bosanquet's references to the state are predominantly to the nation state (1917a, p. 295), and Miller argued that there are good reasons for states and nations to coincide. More to the point, there are essential similarities in the reasons why these two thinkers believe in the ethical significance of the nation state. Many of their arguments in defence of the state or the nation, respectively, are based on the particularist nature of communities in principle and the nation state in particular. The state, for Bosanquet, has ethical significance because it embodies the general will and the latter can exist only in specific communities with shared experiences and established traditions. The general will is anchored in specific communities, institutions and practices and the state is 'the largest body which possesses the unity of experience necessary for constituting a general will' (Bosanquet, 1917a, p. 272). Miller's commitment to particularist ethics is explicit. Particularism, for him, works on the assumption 'that memberships and attachments in general have ethical significance.' (Miller, 1999, p. 65) National membership, however, supersedes in ethical significance other memberships for two reasons: existence of public culture and national self-determination. Bosanquet's general will and Miller's public culture are examples of how particularities are constitutive of moral behaviour.

Parallel to these obvious similarities, there is one obvious difference. Miller's particularist reading of the ethical significance of nations leads us to the conclusion that our duties to our fellow countrymen surpass our duties to fellow humans in general. The boundaries to the ethical communities are by the same token boundaries to our duties. Bosanquet's moral philosophy does not lead to this conclusion. Although his particularist reading of the state imbues state boundaries with some moral significance, these boundaries are not in any fundamental way boundaries to one's duties.

The paper explains why in spite of the obvious similarity of seeing morality in particularist terms, the two thinkers ultimately espouse different understandings of morality, moral agency and the scope of duty. I will start by examining the extent of their commonality in bringing morality, community and particularism together. Therefore the first two sections of the paper explain the particularist aspects of Bosanquet's general will and Miller's public culture. Section 3 turns to the universal aspects of these concepts – aspects that are explicit and fundamental for Bosanquet's moral philosophy, but implicit and underplayed by Miller, not least due to his overt commitment to ethical particularism. The paper demonstrates that the different balance between the particular and universal aspects of the general will and the public

culture help reveal the two thinker's different understanding of morality, moral agency and the scope of duty.

The dynamic between particularity and universalism in moral philosophy and the ethics of the nation state could lead to rather significant and controversial policy recommendations. Vincent discusses a recent 'gradual but marked shift' in political theory away from 'universalist forms of argument towards favouring communities and groups', where the groups and communities are seen in particularist terms (2002, p. 1). He views this trend as disconcerting due to its potential threat to basic universal liberal values like commitment to human rights, for example. But is this trend illiberal? Miller, who can be seen not only as an exponent but a driver of this shift towards particularity, claims that he espouses 'social liberalism' (2007, pp 20-1). He believes in human rights but he argues that our duties towards others' human rights vary according to our community membership. Human rights are moral concepts and ethics is community bound, therefore particularist. I share Vincent's concerns with the unconditional association between ethics, community and particularity. Indeed some of these concerns seem to be already justified. Miller's conclusion that our duties towards human rights vary depending on whether others are or are not fellow nationals can be rather disturbing to immigrants, members of cultural and national minorities and citizens of poor states who receive support from richer states.

Against this background, Bosanquet's balancing of particularity and universality is reassuring. It takes on board, or more precisely, anticipates, Miller's strong arguments about community and particularity in ethics. But because of the other, arguably universal, aspects of his moral philosophy, he forecloses the possibility of seeing fellow nationals and foreigners in ethically different terms.

### **1. Bosanquet's general will and its particularity**

Bosanquet's general will is a central concept of his moral and political philosophy. Through it he explains the nature of human agency, of moral agency and of the state. The general will is the organic link between the individual and the state. The individual's 'actual' will, Bosanquet argues, is different from his 'real' will (1899, pp132-4). The real will, on analysis, *is* the general will and the latter is embodied in the state (1899, pp122-36).

The real will contains the totality of our life purposes missing in the actual will. The latter is partial both because it focuses on isolated needs and because it takes account primarily of personal wants. The actual will does not harmonise the diversity of our desires and the discrepancy between the requirements of myself and others (1899, pp. 133-4). It is the will 'we exercise in the trivial routine of daily life' and it is 'narrow, arbitrary, self-contradicting' (1899, p. 125). Our real will is the will that achieves the unity of our overall life intentions and the harmony between our good and the good of others. Therefore the real will is the general will: the will that succeeds in harmonizing the diversity of actual wills.

But generality is only one aspect of the real/general will. The transformation from actual to real/general has a distinct qualitative dimension. Bosanquet embraces Rousseau's distinction between the will of all and the general will as it captures 'the contrast between a mere aggregate and an organic unity' (1899, p. 129). Mere

aggregation of actual wills will not produce a general will but simply a will of all. The general will is possible only if we are able to transform the actual into the real will as these two are qualitatively different. 'The reason why it is necessary to insist upon the distinction between true and apparent interest, universal and aggregate of particulars, General Will and Will of All, is just that a true interest generally requires some degree of energy or effort, perhaps of self-sacrifice; while the purely private or apparent interest, the interest of each of us in his routine frame of mind, is that by which many are always determined, and a whole community is only too likely to be guided.' (1899, p. 130) The transition from actual to real will is not a mechanical but conscious, effort-based process of willing objects conducive to the common good. Only such transformed will can serve as a foundation of the general will (1899, p. 134). This qualitative aspect of the general will – the understanding that to develop general will we have to act on our real, not our actual will, and thus live up to the requirements of the real will – will be referenced in section 3, where the universal aspect of the general will are discussed.

When we come to the question about where exactly the general will is to be found, we will notice the difference between Rousseau and Bosanquet, and will start to appreciate the particularist aspects of Bosanquet's general will. Rousseau famously denigrated representative democracy and claimed that the direct vote is the most appropriate expression of the general will (Rousseau, 1968, p. 141). Bosanquet did not share Rousseau's concerns with democratic representation, nor considered the outcome of the vote to be the best manifestation of the general will (1917b, p. 125; 1927, p. 262; 1988, p. 132).<sup>2</sup> The pertinent observation here is that institutions of democratic representation, as opposed to institutions of direct democracy, for Bosanquet are not deficient but rather efficient expression of the general will. For Rousseau, the general will is embodied either in the whole *body politic*, as opposed to its constituent political factions, or in the 'Laws' and interpreted through the 'Lawgiver' (Rousseau, pp.80-88). Bosanquet agrees but for him the laws and 'the process of interpretation that Rousseau ascribes to the legislator' are only a few among many examples of how public institutions are expressive of the general will: 'the legislator is merely one of the organs of social spirit itself' (1899, p. 134; p. 136). 'The habits and institutions of any community are, so to speak, the standing interpretation of all private wills which compose it, and it is thus possible to assign to the General Will an actual and concrete meaning as something different at once from every private will, and from the vote of any given assembly, and yet as something on the whole, for what both the one and the other necessarily aim at sustaining as the framework of their life.' (1899, p. 136) It is not the direct vote only, and therefore, only the *body politic* (Rousseau, 1968, p. 61), that account for the formation of the general will. For Bosanquet all communities can carry the general will, even those that in Rousseau's term would count as factions and carriers of corporate will, to the extent that they have developed a common stock of models of social interaction and public functions, shared understandings and moral norms, etc. (see also Nicholson, 1990, p. 215).

The general will is particular in at least two related ways. It is particular because it is embodied in particular social institutions and is represented by a stock of moral norms and public roles. It is a reservoir of specific social achievements. It is also particular in the sense of being a product of particular communities, as only particular communities can produce this stock of norms and functions. It is this sense that allows

us to say that it works as a moral boundary. I will expand on both of these ways of being particular.

In more abstract terms, the general will is ‘actual social spirit’ (1899, p. 136), ‘the whole living system of the communal mind’ (1917a, p. 289), ‘the whole assemblage of individual minds, considered as a working system, with parts corresponding to one another and producing as a result a certain life for all those parts themselves’ (1927, pp. 261-2). Practically, it is ‘the complex of social institutions’ (1899, p. 136), the ‘corporations, associations, public bodies’ that function as a network of ‘public functions’, and in general of ‘things of the deepest concern for the community and not managed by individuals for private profit’ (1917b, p. 125). The general will resides in public institutions because these become repositories of moral norms, public functions, agreed regulations, shared knowledge. In this sense, the general will is concrete. Bosanquet even argues that it is more concrete than the private will: ‘the will of any particular person is abstract and fragmentary compared with the will of the state’ (1919, p.75). Our trivial and our more socially sophisticated desires will not come to fruition without the stock of knowledge and skills deposited in society as a whole. The private person’s will lacks substance unless it is ‘supplemented, reinforced and controlled by the co-operation of minds and wills which is the community’ (1919, pp. 75-76).

As a reservoir of shared knowledge, norms and public functions the general will allows us to fulfil our ‘special vocation’ (1919, p. 75), or our social and moral intentions. Doing so is harder than pursuing personal objectives, as in public matters you could not follow only your personal convictions: ‘you must not enforce your own religion’ (1919, p. 76). Unless there is a common stock of norms through which you could express your position, you will find yourself in difficulty at finding a socially workable solution: your only option will be to enforce ‘your own religion’ by, metaphorically speaking, resorting to ‘the Inquisition straight away, or perhaps civil war’ (1919, p. 76). The existence of a particular stock of agreed norms and procedures is expressly useful for the realisation of moral intentions. Therefore the general will is best represented by its functioning at the level of the state. At this level it is ‘embodied in a system of rights’ (1899, p.215; see also 1917a, p. 271).

The second way in which the general will is particular is related to the first: we can only develop a common stock of norms and social roles if we live in communities bound by time and space. This stock of shared values has to be built – it is not a given, but an achievement. It is based on collaboration over time. The general will can only be found in a ‘genuine community sharing a common sentiment and animated by a common tradition’ (1917a, p. 292). It would be logical then to argue that there should be some limitation to the size of the community where a functional interaction was expected to take place. For Bosanquet, it is the state that marks the size limit to this community: ‘the state will be for every group the largest body which possesses the unity of experience necessary for constituting a general will’ (1917a, p. 272). The two features that make particularity constitutive of the general will are the necessity of relatively settled moral norms or relatively established social practices, on the one hand, and the existence of specific communities, that is, communities as defined by specific time and space, on the other.

What are the functions achieved by the particularity of the general will and what is their moral value? I would argue that the general will functions as a facilitator and amplifier<sup>3</sup> of moral behaviour. The facilitating function is achieved by the fact that the general will gives us ready models of moral action: as was demonstrated in the explanation of the first way in which the general will was seen as particular. By being a reservoir of common knowledge, norms and public functions, the general will spares us the trouble of finding the efficient ways in which we could deliver our moral intentions: it carries a rich stock of these efficient ways and we could choose the most suitable one.

The general will is also an amplifier of moral behaviour as membership in communities stimulates our desire to do good things for others. Bosanquet's commentary on patriotism makes a clear point of demonstrating the mobilising power of communities, and particularly of the nation state. 'Patriotism, we have said, is an immense natural force, a magical spell. It rests, I suppose mainly on three things: your family and kindred – the tie of blood – which extends to the nation as a whole; your home – the actual place and land with which you have ties of custom and affection; and, what includes these two and more, your whole power and means of acting upon the world – language, ideas, modes of life, social habits.' (1917c, p. 3) Communities in principle, and the nation state in particular, are powerful moral motivators. Interestingly, however, it is in this essay, 'The Teaching of Patriotism', that Bosanquet comments that the 'natural force' of patriotism could go either way – it can be constructive and distractive, so we have to think more carefully about what turns patriotism into a positive force. Both the facilitating and the amplifying functions of the particularity of the general will have their moral limitations and these will be discussed in section 3.

## **2. The ethical function of particularity for Miller; the concept of public culture**

For David Miller particularity is a central feature of ethical discourse. He discusses the ethics of nationality in the framework of ethical particularism. He views ethical particularism and ethical universalism as 'two competing accounts of the structure of ethical thought' (1995, p. 49). In this sense there is more to Miller's ethical particularism than simply 'particularity'. However examining the function of particularity in his theory of nationality in a similar manner we examined it in the context of Bosanquet's political philosophy will reveal and explain many of its significant aspects.

I will demonstrate first the logic according to which ethical particularists ascribe distinctive ethical significance to relationships or membership in communities (I will use these terms interchangeably), and second, the reasons national communities have yet more distinct ethical status. On the basis of Miller's arguments I will comment on the particularist aspects of his ethics. That will prepare the ground for the following section where I will look into those elements that are not 'particular', but universal.

Ethical particularism, as an account of the structure of ethical thought, differs from its counterpart ethical universalism on the grounds that the former derives ethical reasoning from the commitments of specific relationships, while the latter is premised on abstract rational principles (1995, p. 50). Miller, in agreement with the ethical

particularists, argues that the ethical universalist misunderstands moral agency on at least two accounts. Universalism 'draws a sharp line between moral agency and personal identity on the one hand, and between moral agency and personal motivation on the other' (1995, p. 57). So for Miller, ethics is particularist because it is premised on relationships not on abstract principles. More specifically, relationships are constitutive of ethics, because personal identity, inextricably linked to moral agency, is derived from membership of particular communities, and because relationships generate personal motivation for one to follow his or her duty.

A major advantage of ethical particularism over ethical universalism is that the former takes into account the significance of moral motivation, while the latter commits 'to abstract rationality that exceeds the capacities of ordinary human beings' (1995, p. 58). 'For the mass of mankind', according to ethical particularists and to Miller, 'ethical life must be a social institution whose principles must accommodate natural sentiments towards relatives, colleagues and so forth ...' (1995, p. 58) For Miller, it is a fact that we have stronger feelings and more favourable disposition towards those with whom we are in a relationship. While ethical particularism accommodates this fact, ethical universalism bypasses it. Although aspects of Miller's assessment leave the impression that both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages (1995, pp 64; 80), he is rather good in demonstrating that the key allegations against ethical particularism can be successfully rebutted. For example, it can be demonstrated that on analysis, the pluralistic nature of ethical particularism does not entail conservatism or incoherence. He can also demonstrate, contra popular allegations, ethical particularism is impartial. Let me review these in turn.

Ethical particularism is inherently pluralistic as it does not establish any universal moral principles. The different relationships we belong to pose different ethical demands for us, 'and there is no single overarching perspective from which we can rank or order these demands' (1995, p. 53). This, Miller admits, may lead to either conservatism or incoherence. This is because such understanding of ethics sanctions existing moral practices on the one hand, and fails to give us definitive moral guidance, on the other (1995, p.56). However, neither of these is fully accurate. As we shall shortly see, the ethics of nationality, and public culture in particular, will resolve both of these issues. The deliberative aspects of public culture guard against extreme conservative tendencies, and its relatively resilient nature helps us find solutions to moral dilemmas.

Another high profile critique of ethical particularism is that it cannot uphold impartiality. If one views special bonds between people as a morally desirable feature, how could one exercise impartiality of judgement? Miller's observation that ethical particularism can successfully uphold impartiality, comes to show that all significant moral tasks can be trusted in the hands of ethical particularism. The reason an ethical particularist can be impartial is because impartiality consist in applying a rule even-handedly in accordance to 'ethically sanctioned rules and procedures' (1995, p. 54). But rules and procedures have their contents constituted by specific relationships. In other words, once we come to see that moral norms are not universal but generated by relationships, we will understand why impartiality and ethical particularism are fully compatible.

When we turn to Miller's ethics of nationality we can see at least two reasons why the moral bonds forged by membership in a nation outweigh other moral bonds: national identity and public culture. National identity has the unique capacity of 'evoking fierce, and indeed often supreme, loyalty, manifested in people's willingness to give up their lives for their community' (1995, p. 68). This exceptional degree of commitment, however, is not necessarily matched by specific knowledge of what exactly we should do for our nation. Although we know reasonably well what to do for those who belong in our closer communities, we know little of our distant fellow compatriots. This gap in our knowledge is filled up by 'a public culture' which, among other things, 'helps to fix responsibilities' (1995, p. 68). On analysis that public culture fulfils a cluster of related functions not dissimilar to the functions of Bosanquet's general will. I will look into three of its aspects. It is resilient; it is subject to political debate, so although resilient it is flexible; and it allows us to develop relations based on 'loose reciprocity' as opposed to relationships based merely on 'strict reciprocity' (1995, pp. 67-73).

I will review these aspects of public culture in more detail in order to demonstrate the mechanisms through which national communities generate duties and to trace the place of particularity, and eventually of universality, in these mechanisms.

Public culture represents 'a set of ideas about the character of the community' and it emerges as a result of joint experience and public debate. As such it has specific, fixed, contents which gives it certain 'ideological coloration' (1995, pp. 68-9). As public cultures embody specific moral norms, they are good in providing guidance about particular responsibilities people have. The contents of the norms embedded in the public culture are both resilient and flexible. They are subject to interpretation and influenced by political debate, but they are also sediments from previous political debates and thus resilient to quick changes. This resilience has its virtues as it limits the power of governments. The public culture serves as a reservoir of justifications that allows one to resist the powers that be. The flexibility of public culture, that is, the fact that it is shaped up by public deliberation, is also a very commendable feature. It allows defenders of the ethics of nationality, like Miller himself, to resist the standard accusation that ethical particularism is inherently conservative as it sanctifies traditional practices. Once we understand that public culture 'results from rational deliberation over time about what it is to belong to the nation in question', i.e., that it is significantly impacted by the process of political debate, we will see that the ethics of nationality has its mechanism of advancing moral reform (1995, p.70).

The third aspect of public culture I would like to discuss here is its ability to foster loose reciprocity over and above strict reciprocity. Miller develops this observation by comparing obligations of nationality with obligations of citizenship. The obligations of citizenship are discharged through the state. The state secures for its citizens rights of personal protection and welfare rights while, in return, citizens have the obligation to keep the law, pay their taxes and uphold the welfare schemes. Because of the formal nature of the state, the obligations of citizenship are guaranteed – where citizens fail to live up to their duties, the state will force them to do so. Where nation and state coincide, the obligations of nationality are discharged through the state.

However, obligations of nationality are not superseded, or made redundant, by the efficiency of the state to discharge obligations of citizenship. Obligations of



nationality have an element lacking in obligations of citizenship. The latter are premised on strict reciprocity. Citizens are motivated by the 'principle of fairness' which implies that 'each would expect to benefit from their association in proportion to his or her contribution' (1995, pp. 71-2). This is not the case with obligations of nationality. The bonds of nationality motivate people to offer aid even in circumstances where no reciprocal benefit can be afforded. The membership in the community gives one assurance that one's positive contribution, even when not immediately repaid, will be appreciated and will serve a common purpose. Thus even if strict reciprocation is not the case, one's service to others would never be a pure loss. By making a contribution one is 'helping to sustain a set of relationships from which he stands to benefit to some degree' (1995, p. 67). Without obligations of nationality, Millar argues, the obligations of citizenship will not be able to carry us beyond strict reciprocity. The distinct ethical virtue of nationality is its capacity to foster loose reciprocity.

Having discussed Miller's ethics of nationality and its key ingredient, public culture, I would like to comment on how exactly his ethical particularism is particular. It is particular in a very similar way to Bosanquet's general will. The stock of moral norms, values, rules and practices is particular. Also the communities within which these norms, values, rules and practices evolve over time are particular. The two moral functions fulfilled by the particularist aspects of Bosanquet's general will are also fulfilled by Miller's public culture: it amplifies and facilitates moral behaviour. The existing shared norms and values carried by the public culture stimulate our moral action. We are likely to do *more* good things for people with whom we share public culture. Also this existing stock of moral norms, rules and procedures help us make difficult moral decisions – either by giving us tried and tested paths for action or by offering useful procedures through which to find answers to hard moral questions.

### **3. The universalist aspects of the general will and public culture**

There are at least three ways in which Bosanquet's theory of the state and the general will entail commitment to universal principles. Firstly, the general will has to be tested against the quality of the *values* it helps deliver: a consideration well developed in his understanding of patriotism, but also deeply embedded in his basic theory of the general will. Secondly the 'adjudicatory' capacity of the general will, that is, its capacity to be an ultimate arbiter in cases of moral conflict, represents in essence a universalising as opposed to a particularising tendency. Thirdly, Bosanquet's moral theory allocated a significant if not central place to moral aspirations, or what he would often call 'moral spirit'. The moral aspirations or the moral spirit are a permanent underlying factor of morality in general, even if they only come to fruition through the clothing of the particular moral norms, rules, practices and social institutions. As such they are universal. On analysis, Miller's public culture also has universal elements. These include its capacity to foster loose reciprocity and deliver impartiality, and its deliberative nature. The ascription of exclusive ethical value to nationality, also presupposed some universal moral standard. However, Miller's understanding of morality does not contain an equivalent to Bosanquet's moral aspirations or moral spirit. I will look at the above mentioned universalising aspects of the general will and public culture in turn.

Bosanquet's belief in the ethical nature of the state is well demonstrated in his book *The Philosophical Theory of the State* and his essays 'The Teaching of Patriotism', 'The Function of the State in Promoting the Unity of Mankind', and 'Patriotism in the Perfect State'. The ethical nature of the state is derived from the ethical nature of the general will. Bosanquet's most definitive defence of the state is based on the claim that 'the community which organises itself as a state will be for every group the largest body which possesses the unity of experience necessary for constituting general will' (1917a, p. 272).

Bosanquet's association between the general will and the state helps reinforce the particularist dimension of the general will – its reliance on being anchored in a specific community that endures and develops over time, and its dependence on people sharing 'same mind and feeling' (1917c, p. 3, 1917a, p. 271). However, Bosanquet's discussion of the nature of patriotism brings us very quickly to the more universal aspects of the general will. His thoughts on patriotism demonstrate that the national fellow feeling is a positive force only if it is premised on the right values. 'No patriotism or no politics are trustworthy unless they are kept sweet and clean by a real fundamental love for the things that are not diminished by being shared – such as kindness, beauty and truth.' (1917c, p.12) Therefore the ethical significance of the state is not derived merely from the existence of specific national community, but from the quality of the values it helps us foster. One of the arguments here is that specific communities tend to inspire the opposite sets of commitments: towards objects that are divisive and generating hostility, on the one hand, and towards values that help overcome conflict and generate more welfare for all. For example, the family is seen as 'the root of all selfishness and narrowness and jobbery', on the one hand, but also as 'the root of all morality and civilisation' (1917c, pp. 4-5). In a similar manner patriotism could be either 'a source brainless and often fraudulent clamour, or at best a dangerous fanaticism', or 'a daily and sober loyalty, which recognises the root of our moral being in the citizen spirit and citizen duty ... and a love of our country as an instrument and embodiment of truth, beauty and kindness' (1917c, pp 3, 16). The particular community as such can generate both good and bad will, and what helps us distinguish the first from the second is a principle of some universal nature.

This intrinsic orientation of the general will towards objects of value can also be seen in Bosanquet's argument in favour of the nation state over and above mankind in general. His claim is that unlike humankind, which is nothing else but mere aggregation of all people, the nation state nurtures a framework within which people lead valuable lives. He introduces a dichotomy between 'quality' and 'crowd', where quality is embodied in the nation state due to its capacity to foster 'values which govern our aspirations to the best life' (1917a, p. 291) and the crowd represents the non-communal nature of humankind and therefore the nonexistence of quality.<sup>4</sup> This connects well with Bosanquet's understanding of the general will as distinct from the will of all, discussed in section 1. It is not the mere aggregation of human wills that produces what is special in the general will. The general will is an outcome of transformation of the actual will into real will. It is not the lowest common denominator of our aggregate desires, but a qualitatively different formation which overcomes the shortcomings of the actual will. Unlike the actual will, the general will is directed towards unity, overcoming of conflict and cultivation of virtue. One way in which we can understand the specific contents of what Bosanquet sees as valuable or

representation of 'best life' is to see it as a form of overcoming feelings and tendencies that separate us or inflate conflict. We can understand the values and ideals of the general will as 'an antidote to fanaticism and partisan bias and blind self-deception, all of which moods are disastrous in great affairs' (1917c, p. 16).

Interestingly, while the nation state has significant ethical advantages compared to humankind as a mechanical aggregation of people, there are communities and organisations that have ethical advantages over the nation state. Sometimes the state falls on the wrong side of the quality divide. For example, Bosanquet distinguishes between 'political' and 'social', or between political in the 'narrower' and 'wider' sense, where the first has to do with 'the governmental machine' or matters on which 'the party machinery has to be applied' and the second is related to 'things of the deepest concern for the community and not managed by individuals for private profit, but by corporations, associations, public bodies, as we call them, of all possible kinds, ancient and modern' (1917b, p. 125; see also Simhony, 2013). The moral value of a community is related to its success in fostering activities which promote worthy values.

In the context of the state, the general will has an additional universalising function. As we know, for Bosanquet, the general will does not belong exclusively to the state. Any community that has achieved a degree of unity and thus helps its members to achieve the ideals of 'best life' possesses general will. 'Where two or three are gathered together with any degree of common experience, there is *pro tanto* a general will.' (1899, p. 18) However, there are two ways in which the state has an 'absolute' character, and the second is rather pertinent with respect to the general will. The state is absolute, first because it is a coercive institution of highest order and second because of its function of an ultimate adjudicator (1917a, pp 273-4; 1899, pp 181-2). These two functions are related, as the second offers legitimation of the first. It is the state's role of 'ultimate arbiter and regulator' which gives it 'the right to exercise force in the last resort' and thus makes it 'a unit lawfully exercising force' (1899, p. 181). What is of interest to us is the adjudicatory function of the general will in the context of the state – its capacity for 'ultimate and effective adjustment of the claims of individuals, and of the various social groups in which the individuals are involved' (1899, p. 181). Adjudicatory function is universalising in nature. Its objective is not to forward particular moral norms and social practices but to resolve conflicts between these when they arise. In the context of adjudication, the specific character of communal rules and practices is not being affirmed but temporarily suspended in the name of a solution acceptable across community borders.

Finally, I will look at the idea of moral aspirations that are part and parcel of Bosanquet's general will. It could be one of the best illustrations of how the universality and particularity of the general will are intertwined. In several essays Bosanquet argues that the state and the general will do not threaten individual freedom, but are, on analysis, fundamentally indispensable even when it comes to matters of private conscience and political dissent (1919, 1917a). He develops this argument in reply to anti-idealist critiques to which his philosophical theory of the state has been subjected after the First World War. His opponents would claim that the state is a source of 'war, exploitation within and without, class privilege, arbitrary authority, discontent directing ambitions to foreign conquest and to jealousy of other states' (1917a, p. 276). Also strong social institutions and a strong state in particular,

threaten individual freedom (Hobhouse, 1918, pp 44-70). Therefore the power of the state, according to them, should be weakened not strengthened. Bosanquet's reply is that any moral perspective, even the anti-establishment ones, are shaped and expressed through social structures. 'The rebel draws his matter and suggestion from the co-operating minds.' (1919, p.76) A stronger state with a functional general will would be the best environment to channel moral ideas, be they for or against the establishment. 'The remedy for disorganisation is not less organisation, but more.' (1917a, p. 281) What is of interest to us in this debate is that Bosanquet and his opponents share a common premise: the importance of moral aspirations. While his opponents believe that the state suppresses them, he argues that the state, due to its possession of general will, is crucial for their realisation.

Another way in which we could demonstrate the nature of moral aspirations will be through Bosanquet's argument behind the claim that the state is 'the guardian of a whole moral world, but does not itself act in a moral world' (1917a, p. 288) – a claim to which we will also return in section 4. Here Bosanquet wants to explain the difference between the moral task of the private person and that of the state. The idea is that the state, through the general will, functions as the framework within which individuals' moral spirit can find expression. There is no equivalent framework which will allow the state to express its moral agency. There is no recognised moral order with the characteristics of the general will that exists beyond the state. Therefore the genuine moral world is that within, not without the nation state. In this context Bosanquet discusses the nature of morality and I believe this discussion throws light on the interplay of universality and particularity. Bosanquet argues that there is 'no such thing in ethics as an absolute rule or an absolute obligation, unless it were that of so far as possible realising the best life' (1917a, p. 285). There is no absolute rule, but there is an underlying principle. 'Every situation is in some degree, however slightly, new; and his moral duty is to be equal to it, to deal with it, to mould it ....' What is it that steers us in this uncertainty? One 'moulds' his situation '*in accordance with the moral spirit which is in him*, into contribution to the realisation of best life' (1917a, p. 285, emphasis added). So the universal dimension in Bosanquet's understanding of morality is not to be found in rational moral rules – which is how Miller reads ethical universalism (1995, p. 50) – but in the moral spirit which the general will helps deliver. And here we can see one more reason for the indispensability of the general will: precisely because there are no absolute moral rules, the reservoir of norms and practices carried by the general will turns out invaluable. But this reservoir is never full to capacity: 'the private individual has still in principle a new morality constantly to create' (1917a, p. 286). The moral aspirations are universal but they need to be delivered in the particular clothing of the existing repository of moral norms, rules and practices. We can argue that this incompleteness of the repository is an indication that, ultimately, the driving force of morality is the moral spirit. This does not diminish the significance of the general will as it aims to reflect the moral action fully. The 'true general will' is not 'a mere external convention' (1899, p. 150). One of the messages here is that the state is the universe of moral action, therefore it cannot be easily understood as a moral agent itself. The state, and its general will, put all elements of moral action together – the moral spirit of the individuals *and* the social norms, rules, knowledge and practices that allow this spirit to come to practical fruition. Morality 'is a systematic structure, such as to bring home its *universal* demand in a *particular* and appropriate form to every moral being according to its conditions' (1917a, p. 285, emphasis added).

Having seen the three ways in which Bosanquet's general will is universal, we can turn to Miller and tease out the universal aspects of his understanding of loose reciprocity, impartiality and deliberation. Thus, it will be demonstrated that the concept of public culture, in a similar manner to the concept of general will, combines particularity with universality. It will be commented at the end of the section, however, that Miller's moral theory holds no equivalent to Bosanquet's moral aspirations. This could throw some light on why the two thinkers see the limits of our duty in a different fashion.

As our discussion in the previous section demonstrated, loose reciprocity reflects our preparedness to do things for others even if the prospects for equivalent reciprocation of our good deed are not there. Communities stimulate actions of good will, because even if strict reciprocation is not an option, there will nevertheless be a 'loose' one – we stand to benefit either in another way, or in the long term. The principle behind loose reciprocity, however, is the same as the principle behind moral action: preparedness to suspend the pursuit of personal goals, in the name of common goals. Choosing to give without immediate reciprocation is a form of moral action because one has decided to act for the welfare of the others. Miller's argument in favour of the ethical significance of the community is that membership in a community reconciles the tension between 'private aims' and 'obligations'. In the community 'I see my own welfare as bound up with the community to which I belong' therefore 'contributing towards it is also a form of goal fulfilment' (1995, pp 66-7). In this context, Miller claims that while universalist ethics sees an endemic tension between personal goals and public good, the particularist ethics reconciles these. But his argument does not demonstrate a fundamentally different understanding of morality to that of the universalists. Morality seen as a commitment to the common good is a shared premise for both parties. Even *the conflict* between personal goals and public good is a shared premise, otherwise Miller's argument that community enhances moral motivation will not work. The reason we should ascribe ethical significance to communities is that they are excellent reconciliators of the tension between private and public values. If this tension was not assumed in the first place, the motivational power of the community would lose its objective.

Miller's argument that ethical particularism upholds impartiality cannot be sustained on a purely particularist ground as well. His claim there, as discussed in section 2, is that the rules which we impartially uphold are particular in nature. However, even if the particularity of the rule stays in place, the particularity of relationships has to be suspended. When I apply a rule impartially, I abstract myself from the particular relationships I am in. In other words, some particularities stay in place but others do not. More to the point, the very particularity that is suspended in the context of impartiality – that of relationships – is one with vital significance for Miller's theory of the ethical nature of communities. So impartiality can be upheld by ethical particularism but at the cost of giving up a very significant ingredient of its constitution. An ethical particularist could hold on rather firmly to the particularity of rules and argue that these are premised on relationships: thus relationships will still retain ethical significance. But the fact that the more immediate relationships – those to which the impartial judge belongs – have to be put aside, means that ethical particularism has to make a significant concession to its universalist counterpart.

The deliberative character of public culture is another aspect that puts limits to particularity. If ethical particularism is defined through its defence of public culture, its opponents, Miller claims, could not criticise it on the grounds of being a sanctifier of ‘merely traditional ethical relations’ (1995, p. 70). Processes of rational deliberation and political debate help adjust the different rules and values of the smaller communities, as a result of which ‘ethical relations’ do not stay the same but change. Deliberation and debate have a universalising tendency as they aim to harmonise conflicting particularities. Even though the resulting product, that is, public culture in a particular point in time, is also particular, the process of its creating entails overcoming irreconcilable differences. In this context, Miller’s claim that ‘people greatly value living under their own rules and according to their own cultural beliefs’ (2007, p.21) has to be counterbalanced against the demands for rational deliberation and political compromise that stem from public culture. It also has to be counterbalanced by the equally valid observation that people value living in a just society where the diversity of rules and cultures is a pertinent factor of almost any national community.

Miller’s defence of the distinct ethical significance of the nation state also betrays universalist underpinning. The fact that the ethical significance of some communities surpasses that of others, not only undermines the pluralistic nature of ethical particularism<sup>5</sup>, but draws a comparison that can work only against a universal standard.

Finally, we can address the issue about whether Miller’s ethics gives us an equivalent to Bosanquet’s moral aspirations. The negative answer to this question could offer some of the explanation of the different approaches Bosanquet and Miller have to the limits to our duty as imposed by communities. Put in figurative terms, Bosanquet’s morality covers a larger domain than Miller’s. While, for Miller, morality builds on duties, for Bosanquet, it builds on moral aspirations and duties, and if anything, duties are an outgrowth of moral aspirations. We could judge the scope of Miller’s moral sphere from his recommendation ‘always to see human beings as patients and agents: needy and vulnerable creatures who cannot survive without the help of others, but at the same time as people who can make choices and take responsibility for their lives’ (2007, p. 21). Seeing the domain of morality as stretched by two opposing parameters, an agent and a patient, I find coherent with Bosanquet’s morality (Dimova-Cookson, 2011, pp 60-62). But I would draw attention to the nature of agency envisaged here. There is a puzzling lack of symmetry between Miller’s agent and the patient. The patient is the recipient of care, while the agent provides care for herself. A more symmetrical relationship would portray the agent as a provider of care for the patient, as opposed to a merely self-sufficient person. A Bosanquetian framework would definitely envisage the agent as a provider of service for others. So while for Miller the moral spectrum stretches between self-sufficient people on the one hand and dependent people on the other, for Bosanquet it stretches between those who provide for others and those who receive this provision. As I said, the difference here is in the understanding of moral agency. Bosanquet’s moral agent is not simply self-reliant but outward oriented. Moral action allows her to fulfil her moral aspirations. Thus moral action is gratifying for the patient *and* the agent. For Miller morality and moral agency are based on duty – duty to care after oneself and others. But there is no obvious motivation stemming from the agent himself. Not surprisingly, for him relationships and social institutions are vital, if not exclusive, providers of moral

motivation. For Bosanquet moral aspiration functions as a spring of motivation and this is a source of motivation that exists over and above that generated by social networks. In other words, in the context of Bosanquet's moral theory, motivation springs not only from the particular, but also from the universal aspects of the general will.

#### **4. Are there boundaries to duty?**

The ethical particularism espoused by Miller entails boundaries to our duties. As ethics derives its contents from membership in particular communities, the borders of these communities translate as limits to our duties. Our duties towards our fellow countrymen, for example, surpass those towards foreigners. Despite the fact the Bosanquet shares many of Miller's considerations about the different moral logic of the relationships that operate within and without the state, the British idealist does not advance a conclusion about community based limits to our duties. I will examine Miller's reasoning behind seeing the national and international orders in different moral lights. This reasoning is revealed in his distinction between social and global justice. I will then re-visit Bosanquet's assessment of the different moral tasks of the person and of the state, as this assessment mirrors well some of the logic of Miller's distinction. I will then argue that even if Bosanquet's ideas imply certain boundaries to our duties, these boundaries are contingent and not necessary. Moral relations between members of different states are for both thinkers possible, but for Bosanquet they are also desirable.

Miller's ethics of nationality underpins his distinction between social and global justice. While social justice operates within the state, global justice is related to the international order. As these two justices function within different communities, their moral principles could not be identical. Social justice is practiced among 'citizens of the same political community' and it is 'a matter of establishing the conditions under which they can continue to act as free and equal citizens: it includes, for instance, a range of rights such as freedom of expression and the right to vote that define the status of citizen, as well as rights to material resources (such as a minimal income) that enable people to function effectively as citizens in a political sense' (2007, p. 15). What characterises the sphere of social justice is the existence of a complex and intricate social infrastructure that needs to be in place so that things like rights protection, resource redistribution and democratic participation are made possible. No such complexity and intricacy can be observed at the level of global justice. If there are any social institutions at global level that protect rights, redistribute resources and have democratic constitution, they are considerably less effective in performing these functions. People are already constituted as citizens within the parameters of the state, that is, within the framework of social justice, so the tasks of global justice, whatever they are, are not of the same political nature. This takes us to a significant difference between social and global justice. The fact that people enter the sphere of global justice as accomplished citizens implies a different moral agenda. In a global context, people relate to each other 'as citizens of independent national communities, where each citizen body has a collective interest in determining the future of its own community' (2007, p. 15). While in the framework of social justice we related to each other from the premises of our shared interest to help each other become citizens, in the framework of global justice we aim, among other things, to protect the achievement of our citizenship. In other words, we do not have the same moral

interactions with members of other political communities. Miller takes this observation a step further. Attempting to have the same moral interactions, that is, to protect rights, share resources and democratically deliberate with foreigners in the same way as with fellow nationals is not only difficult, but undesirable. Such moral outreach will be ill-advised, as in addition the practical hurdles to our good intentions, we will be doing something wrong. We will be undermining the other citizens' political self-determination (1995, p. 77; 2007, p. 19).

So the limits to our duties are both contingent *and* morally desirable. They are contingent, because as a matter of fact, the state puts boundaries on social justice. Institutions that foster social justice tend to operate at state level. We could view this as a contingent limitation as we can imagine that these institutions enlarge their remit and thus expand the numbers of people who acquire citizenship under them. Miller even suggests, that 'we can imagine a course of political change that leads eventually to a world state within which human being everywhere would indeed relate to one another as equal citizens' (2007, pp 15-16). This would be a difficult and time costly project, but not an impossible one.

But the limits to our duties are also morally desirable. Thinking of social and global justice in separate terms, and in this vein, thinking of our duties to fellow nationals as more extensive than our duties to foreigners, is desirable because it is morally good to protect state autonomy. It is good to uphold the ethical significance of the national borders. It is not only that 'ironing out differences between nations would be unfeasible or involve high levels of coercion', but that people 'want to be in control of their own destiny, and fiercely resent it when outsiders try to interfere, even with benevolent intentions' (2007, pp 21; 264). Moral outreach will trespass on national self-determination and affect adversely the citizen, and implicitly moral, constitution of foreigners.

As I discussed in section 3, Bosanquet's distinction between 'the moral position of the private individual' and that of the state is very important, because the first of these is the paradigmatic moral world and gives us plenty of insights into Bosanquet's understanding of morality in principle (1915, p. 137). The distinction between these two worlds – 'of morals and of international politics' (1915, p. 371) - is also of interest as it parallels Miller's distinction between social and global justice. The moral world of the private person is the state, and is thus equivalent to social justice, while the moral world of the state is that of international politics and is thus equivalent of global justice. Bosanquet's commentary about the difference between these is similar to Miller's in several ways. First of all, the state is the paradigmatic moral universe and the task of the international community is to protect the 'morals' as achieved by the state, not to replicate it in its own rights. 'The immediate task of morals is to live a life, that of international politics to provide a world within which life can be lived.' (1915, p.137) The state is 'the ark which carries our treasure' (1915, p.135). In other words, the state has a distinct ethical significance: significance as marked against that of the international community. The virtues we cultivate 'at home' will make us good international citizens – a message that tallies well with Miller's vision of 'national responsibility as a vehicle of global justice' (2007, p. 269.). Secondly, because of its distinguished moral status, the state has a certain inward orientation. Its pursuit of 'might' through means of war is legitimate (1915, pp 135-6). The duty of the state towards its citizens will outweigh its duty towards citizens of other states. This,



however, does not mean that the duties of individuals towards compatriots outweigh their duties towards foreigners.

Why is that the case? Why, in view of the similarities between Miller's and Bosanquet's approaches to the ethics of the nation state and ethics of international relation, would we argue that Bosanquet does not see state borders as boundaries to our duties as well?

First, the fact that 'the nature of private morality' is superior to that of 'international politics' (1915, p. 150) carries implications which Miller does not, but Bosanquet does pursue. What states are allowed to do in pursuits of might is not the same as what individuals are expected or allowed to do in moral terms. The state can be inwardly oriented, but not individuals. The very nature of the morality which the state harbours varies for the two thinkers. For Miller, morality is the framework within which duties find concrete expression. For Bosanquet, it is the framework within which individuals' moral aspirations find concrete expression, either as duties or as service. As we discussed in the previous section, moral aspirations play a central role in the workings of morality and the general will, and this makes a difference with respect to the moral horizon individuals have. The Bosanquetian moral horizon is outwardly expanding: its limitation by particular parameters of the general will is contingent, not necessary.

Second, the morality harboured by the state is outward not only in format but in contents. The ethical value of the nation state, for Bosanquet, is not unconditional. It is true that only the general will can account for moral action and the general will is associated with the state, which makes the state ethically indispensable. But the contents of the values that the national community fosters determine its ethical legitimacy (see section 3). The moral values of the state have to be outward oriented, inclusive of those outside, mindful of the wellbeing of all. 'The moral view *of the world* which you and your state stand up for is one thing. A moral view which considers only your own and your state's immediate interest is quite another thing....' (1915, p. 134, emphasis added). The latter will not be ethically legitimate. The inward orientation of the state is justified on the grounds of protecting morality as an ultimate human achievement, but the contents of this morality demands an outward attitude. States are allowed to protect their state borders in order to preserve the general will and the moral practices associated with it. But the purpose of morality is to foster best life, to create things that are not diminished by sharing (Bosanquet, 1917c, p. 12).

One way to resolve this tension would be to differentiate between the duties of the states and duties of individuals. The state can make certain decisions in favour of its citizens, but there is reason in principle why individual should distinguish between compatriots and foreigners in the context of their ethical reasoning. There are contingent reasons. The lack of shared general will is likely to diminish the possibilities to express or deliver effectively one's moral intentions. It is also likely to diminish our moral motivation. But these are contingent, not necessary limitations to the scope of our duty.

## **Conclusion**

The paper discusses the balance between particularity and universality in Bosanquet's concept of the general will and Miller's concept of public culture. Both thinkers give us grounds to believe that morality has significant particular dimensions displayed in the specific nature of moral norms, practices and social institutions, and in the time and place bound nature of communities. However, on analysis, the general will and the public culture have universal aspects found in the commitment to permanent values, the unifying and conflict overcoming tendencies and the nature of moral aspirations in the case of Bosanquet, and in the vision of morality as contribution to others' wellbeing, the commitment to impartiality, and the endorsement of public deliberation as means of overcoming conflicts in the case of Miller. While with Bosanquet the balance between universality and particularity is explicit, with Miller, who officially extols the virtues of ethical particularism, the universal dimensions are underplayed and mostly implicit. They are also less, due to the lack of an equivalent to moral aspirations in his moral theory. The different degree and nature of the two thinkers' universalism is reflected in their different vision of morality and moral agency which helps explain one significant difference between them: their assessment of the community based limits to the scope of duty. While for Bosanquet these limits are merely contingent, for Miller they are morally desirable as well.

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<sup>2</sup> This difference, however, demonstrates Bosanquet's insistence on the will transformative aspect implied in the emergence of the general will.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion about how relationships have an amplifying effect on moral action see also Goodin (2008).

<sup>4</sup> 'Whether humanity can yet be said to have a general will is at least doubtful.' (Bosanquet, 1927, p. 266)

<sup>5</sup> According to Miller, ethical particularists are committed to pluralism, that is, the belief that there is no single overarching perspective from which we can rank the moral demands of various relationships (1995, p. 53).

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